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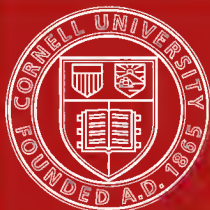
A JUSTIFICATION OF THE CENSORSHIP OF PLAYS

(Together with a demand for the
extension of the principles of that
Office to other branches of the
Public Service.)

With a Prefatory Note by
JOHN GALSWORTHY.

LONDON
WM. HEINEMANN, 21, BEDFORD STREET, W.C.
1909.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

To the British Public.

My sense of justice impels me unwillingly to present to you an Anonymous Plea which has come to my hand, in the hope that you will be able to find the flaw in its logic, which I, with the best intentions, have been unable to discover.

JOHN GALSWORTHY.

June, 1909.

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A JUSTIFICATION OF THE CENSORSHIP OF PLAYS

(together with a Demand for the Extension
of the Principle of that Office to other
Branches of the Public Service).

WE speak of this Censorship as of a principle, a disembodied spirit, incidentally nesting in the frame of such or such a one.

Vested by Act of Parliament—known as “Walpole’s Act,” 10 Geo. II. c. 19—in the Lord Chamberlain, it is delegated by him to an “Examiner of Plays,” whose duties are to read—at a small fee payable by the applicant—every play, presented to him in anticipation of public performance, and to award to it a licence, unless he should consider, *in the free exercise of his discretion*, that it is “contrary to good manners, decorum, and the public peace.”

From his decisions no appeal will lie. Against his verdict the ordinary processes of Law by which all other citizens protect their honour and means of livelihood cannot be set in motion. All is swift, sure, irresponsible.

Such is the simple machinery of an office unparalleled for potent and direct efficiency throughout the Constitution of our State. With the remark that it is entirely untrammelled by competitive examination or election, we pass at once to consideration of the underlying purpose of an Institution which at first sight might seem strange in a democratic country. It will be our province to establish beyond reasonable doubt that this purpose is profoundly democratic in its essence, being no other than the furtherance, if not of the will of the majority, *of what the Censor for the time being deems to be the will of the majority*. In proof thereof, we shall adduce internal and external evidence; first citing in parallel columns twelve plays to which the Censorship has refused, and twelve plays, casually selected, to which it has accorded, licence, within our times :

Plays censured.

Plays licensed.

Œdipus Tyrannus	... (Sophocles)*	The New Baby.
The Cenci	... (Shelley)	The Country Mouse.
Monna Vanna	... (Maeterlinck)	The Devil.
Ghosts	... (Ibsen)	The Cuckoo.
Les trois Filles de M. Dupont	... (Brieux)	The Spring Chicken.

*The names of the authors of censured plays are given, that the reader may judge for himself whether *prima facie* they are or are not likely to be appreciated by the majority of the play-going public.

*Plays censured (contd.).**Plays licensed (contd.).*

Maternité (Brieux)	... Dear Old Charlie.
Les Avariés (Brieux)	... The Orchid.
Mrs. Warren's Profession (Shaw)	... Hush ! not a Word.
Waste (Barker)	... The Giddy Goat.
Les Lionnes Pauvres (A false step). (Augier)	... The Bride and Bridegroom.
The Breaking Point ... (Garnett)	... The Man with three Wives.
Bethlehem* (Housman)	... Hannele† (Hauptmann).

Whatever the contentions of the opponents of this Office, they cannot, and we believe, will not, deny; (a) that, of these two lists of titles, those of the licensed plays carry with them the more direct appeal to the mind of the average man; (b) that the censured plays—most of which are classics, and can be read for the purchasing—would place a greater strain on the intelligence of an average audience; (c) that there is a conspicuous preponderance of tragedy in the censured plays, liable to cause pain to the spectator; and (d) that, whereas an inconsiderable band of scholars, pedants, artists, social reformers, and people of culture might—indeed do, as it appears—desire to witness performances of the censured plays, the great Public has manifested no such wish, but has, on the other hand, been attracted in large

* The case of these two plays, having in common a certain religious character, will be treated separately.

† The name of the author of the licensed play "Hannele," is given, since it presents the exceptional feature of being one not, perhaps, calculated to attract the greater Public.

numbers to the performance of the licensed plays here cited.

From these considerations alone, we should be justified in claiming that, in censoring the plays in the first list, and licensing the plays in the second, the Censorship has accorded with what it might well assume to be the aspirations and desires of the majority. A review of any parallel couple of these plays will irresistibly lead the investigator to the same conclusion.

Comparing, for example, the "Œdipus Tyrannus" with the "New Baby," we find at once a grave difference. The tragedy of the "Œdipus Tyrannus"—however deeply it may stir human feeling—undoubtedly arises from the accidental commission of the crime of incest. This crime is one for which the average man feels, in common with all civilised humanity, a particular aversion. We shall not assert, therefore, that it is with the object of removing temptation from the Public that the Censorship refused its licence to this play ; it is rather because of the terrible and unpleasing nature of the theme. And it cannot well be contended by the opponents of this Office that, in refusing to allow so grim a subject to be dwelt on with tragical insistence before them, the Censorship has deprived the greater Public of any enjoyment whatsoever. On the contrary, it has

surely voiced the natural shrinking of the normal mind from the infliction of spiritual pain, and maintained the ordinary canons of good taste, by suppressing this dubious, if world-famed tragedy. The case of "The New Baby" was different, and we do not wish to labour a comparison between these two plays. "The New Baby" was a pleasant, if somewhat broad, farce, which touched incidentally in the course of its action, on the possibility of a sister marrying a brother, but in such a way as merely to excite laughter, and present no real obstacle either to our understanding or enjoyment.

Passing to another parallel pair of plays, and comparing Maeterlinck's "Monna Vanna" with "The Devil," we shall find the same endeavour to gauge and comply with popular taste guiding the conduct of the Censorship. In the first of these plays, the wife of the commandant of a besieged town magnanimously goes, prepared to sacrifice herself, *nue sous son manteau*, to the tent of a conquering besieger, who has proclaimed this to be the sole condition on which he will spare the lives of the beleaguered citizens. In the second of these two plays the devil tempts a man in a ballroom by suggesting to him that a woman has nothing on beneath her cloak. In neither of these scenes, however, is any actual nudity displayed; and at the first blush it might be

thought difficult to draw a distinction between them. A closer scrutiny reveals the necessary divergence. The veiled nudity in "Monna Vanna" is deeply woven into the psychology of the play ; it is tragic in nature, spiritually essential to the idea of sacrifice. It symbolizes the heights of self-sacrifice which a woman's nature is capable of attaining. It is no trivial incident as in "The Devil." We admit, indeed, that "Monna Vanna" can in no sense be charged with being provocative of vice, for it is a drama of gloomy design, delving deep into the human heart. But in withholding a licence from this play the Censorship has without doubt proved its guardianship of the greater Public's sensibilities and of their healthy shrinking from all manner of spiritual pain and disturbance.

We shall now cursorily compare Brioux's play "Maternité," with the play in the parallel list known as "Dear Old Charlie." Many persons have asserted Brioux's drama to be one of the finest plays by living playwrights, and but very little reasoning will be necessary to show why it is considered wholly unsuitable for performance before the average audience of this country. It was designed by its author, whom we admit to be a dramatist of great distinction, to throw light on a question very vital to those nations whose birth-rate,

at the present time, is diminishing. Nor can it be denied that we are all intimately connected, personally or through other people with the delicate subject of birth. Such facts, however, will not seriously be admitted as evidence for the contention that people should be allowed to witness an imaginative work so moving in words and action as to cause them to reflect with the utmost seriousness on a subject which is hardly fit for mention in the average drawing-room. Let us be understood ! We do not dispute the contention that this play is in essence a masterly and moral exposition of the facts underlying the position of man and woman in regard to birth ; but we say simply and without hesitation that we regard this as an obvious reason for refusing it a licence. For when, to the fact that “*Maternité*” explores a subject too profoundly affecting the welfare of the human race to be deemed fit for public treatment, is added the consideration that the play culminates logically in a social crime unfortunately very common, but so indelicate that it is impossible to mention it—we become aware at once that it is incompatible with common composure to desire a licence for this drama, however clear an illuminator of dark issues it may be, or powerful a deterrent of current immorality. “*Dear Old Charlie*,” on the other hand, though—in its feli-

citous handling of the theme of cuckoldry—suggesting possibly to a prurient mind awkward eventualities, judiciously refrains from developing its action on lines that promote serious thought of consequences. It remains throughout a purely exhilarating piece, stimulative of hilarity and the pleasurable instincts of the average man. Not, it is true, great drama—but providing almost anyone with an agreeable evening's entertainment.

The diverse fates of these two plays establish, in fact, the principle (than which none is now more firmly rooted in the public mind) that the drama must entertain, and not instruct, must follow and not lead, and, conforming to the conventions and taste of the majority *at the moment*, in no sense attempt to be a moral renovator.

We now pass on to examine the parallel cases of the two religious plays given at the end of our lists.

The play "Bethlehem" containing, as it does, scriptural characters, was from its inception out of court, for it has long been the principle of Censorship that the importation into a drama of scriptural personages was contrary to "good manners, decorum, and the public peace." We do not withhold from "Bethlehem" full credit for perfect reverence, but this reverence could not save it, for no play violating a fixed rule of Censor-

ship could even be considered. Why, then—will be the cry of such as are for ever carping at what they call the irresponsibility and inconsistent methods of this Office—was a licence accorded to the English version of Hauptmann's play of "Hannele"? We can perceive a grave distinction. In "Hannele" the greatest of all scriptural characters appears to the little dying girl, but *in the text* He is merely known as "The Stranger," nor is the conventional presentment of His personality suffered on the stage; all shock to public prejudice, or interference with "good manners, decorum, and the public peace," being thereby carefully avoided. In other words (and it is our point) the ruling of the Censorship in this, as in other cases, *is not concerned with the essential matter of the play, but with the presumed taste and feeling towards it, or the majority.*

It has been argued, not without force, by such as have viewed the Passion Plays of Germany and Austria, that for the purpose of bringing the great example of Christ, and the nobility of the Saints, more closely into touch with the lives of men, the drama by its emotionalising character is the most poignant of all mediums. But we would point out that the accuracy of this contention could not be demonstrated in this country without the risks

attendant on experiment; nor do we think that a plébiscite, taken on a point which involved what may be called spiritual adventure, would be favourable to the change. The Censorship is doubtless well aware of this, and is acting in entire accordance with what we assert to be its proper character in refusing to sanction any such advance.

Internal evidence, to show that the endeavour of the Censorship is to promote the pleasure, protect the feelings, and maintain unaltered the æsthetic and moral standards of our greater Public, might be multiplied, *ad libitum*, from the plays we have given in our lists; but without doing this, we merely note that the first eleven plays cited are all censured, not for treating vice in a light, attractive way, but for following out its consequences with grim indelicacy, or for offering severe criticism of current standards of morality, both of which elements in a work of art are natively offensive to the normal sentiments of man.

We now pass to external evidence of the same phenomenon.

It would appear that in 1907 some seventy dramatic authors and men of letters signed a protest against this Censorship in its existing form; and that in 1908 they attended a deputation to the

Home Secretary in support of their contention. It cannot have escaped the meanest intelligence that they were, *primâ facie*, interested parties, unable by the very nature of their position to take an impartial view of a matter which so nearly concerned themselves. This was, in fact, the protest of a number of individuals menaced by another individual able to remove from them at will, without compensation or appeal, the fruits of their labour. No protest by persons placed in their position could be unbiassed or conceived in the broad spirit with which the citizen at large approaches a question of this sort. Those who believe themselves to suffer injustice cannot, it is true, justly be restrained from protest; but when, as seemed to be the fact, there had arisen danger that the injustice might be removed, it became important to consider the relation in which this particular class of person stood towards the will and character of the majority. A careful scrutiny of this list of authors, and knowledge of their works, disclosed the fact that there were amongst them many who had acquired a wide, in some cases a European, reputation for free and advancing speculation, for habits of mind and expression widely dissociated from the accustomed feelings of the masses. They were, in a word, a body of "intellectuals." And the mere

fact that they have been found in protest against this Office is in itself a cogent piece of evidence that the Office is in sympathy with the aspirations and wishes of the more normal portions of the population. The average citizen, happy in the groove within which his birth and associations have embedded him, has from time immemorial resented any attempt to remove him thence; and Censorship may well—indeed must be—in opposition to the spirit of advancing thought, if it is to protect the natural repugnance of the populace in all ages towards a restless intellectual activity.

We have, then, demonstrated, beyond the shadow of a doubt to any fair mind, that this hitherto unique Institution, the Censorship of Plays, not only considers itself, but *is*, in essence, a bulwark for the preservation of average thought and sensibility against the spiritual researches, the dangerous aspirations and speculations, of bolder and too active spirits. In practice it works with a smooth swiftness, a lack of delay and friction unexampled in any public office. No troublesome publicity, or tedious postponement for the purpose of appeal, mar its efficiency. It is neither hampered by the Law nor by the slow process of popular election. Welcomed by the overwhelming majority of the body politic; objected to only by such persons as suffer from it, and

by a negligible faction wedded pedantically to the liberty of the subject, or resentful of summary powers vested in a single person responsible only to his own conscience, it is amazingly, triumphantly successful.

We have now to demand why, in a democratic State, so valuable an adjunct and protector of the will, the interests, and pleasure of the majority is not bestowed on other branches of the public service. Opponents of the Censorship of Plays have been led by the absence of such other Censorships to conclude that this Office is an archaic survival, persisting into times that have outgrown it. They have been known to allege that the reason of its survival is the fact that Dramatic Authors, whose reputation and means of livelihood it threatens, have ever been few in number and poorly organised—that the reason, in short, is the helplessness and weakness of the interests concerned. We combat with force such an aspersion on our Legislature. Can it even for a second be supposed that a State which gives trial by Jury to the meanest, poorest, most helpless of its citizens, and concedes to the greatest criminals the right of appeal, could have debarred a body of reputable men from the ordinary rights of citizenship for so cynical a reason as that their numbers were small, their interests unjoined,

their protests feeble? Such a supposition were intolerable! We do not in this country deprive a class of citizens of their ordinary rights, we do not place their produce under the irresponsible control of one not amenable to Law, *by any sort of political accident!* That would indeed be to laugh at Justice in this Kingdom! That would indeed be cynical and unsound! We shall never admit that there is no basic Justice controlling the edifice of our Civic Rights; we do, we *must* believe that a just and well-considered principle underlies this arbitrary Institution; for else it would not be suffered to survive for a single moment. Neither, holding, as we do, this belief, can we cynically adduce the smallness of the interests concerned in the dramatic department of the public service as good reason for opposing the logical extension of this just and beneficent principle of Censorship. Men of conscience well know that the basic principle which holds good in one branch of the public service must—*short of special reason to the contrary*—hold good in all parallel branches.

If Censorship of the Drama be, as we have shown, in the real interests of the people, or at all events in what the Censor for the time being conceives to be their interest—and must not this be the same

thing ?—then Censorships of Art, Literature, Religion, Science, and Politics are in the interests of the people, unless it can be proved that there exists essential difference between the Drama and these other branches of the public service. We shall now show that there is no such essential difference ; and it is time to urge the Legislature to provide these branches of the public service with those protecting Censorships which have too long been lacking.*

They who endeavour to find logical reason for the absence of these Censorships do so, not by asserting that Literature, Art, Science, Religion, and Politics are more closely attuned than Drama to the ordinary mind ; but by endeavouring to draw other invidious distinctions. The required extension of this Office cannot thus be evaded. But since these distinctions have been, and are still being, disingenuously drawn, we shall consider each individual case.

It is fact, beyond dispute, that every year numbers of books appear which strain the average

* We do not press our contention so far as to ask for Censorship of the Press. For, though strict justice compels us to admit that such is logically required, we consider that the practical difficulties of assessing the suitability of current journalism to the public taste might in these days be a task of too Brobdignagian proportions.

reader's intelligence and sensibilities to an unendurable extent; books whose speculations are totally unsuited to normal thinking powers; books which contain views of morality divergent from the customary, and discussions of themes unsuited to the young person; books which, in fine, provide the greater Public with no pleasure whatsoever, and, either by harrowing their feelings, or offending their good taste, cause them veritable pain.

It is true that, precisely as in the case of Plays, the Public are protected by a vigilant and critical Press from works of this description; in despite of this, it not infrequently happens that the average citizen will purchase such a book. Has he, on discovering its true nature, the right to call on the bookseller to refund its price? He has not. And thus he runs a danger obviated in the case of Drama; for the average playgoer, however well protected by the Press from plays that might cause him pain, has the preliminary protection of a prudential Censorship. How much better, then, that there should exist a paternal authority (some, no doubt, will call it grand-maternal—but sneers must not be confounded with argument), to suppress these books before appearance, and safeguard us from the danger of buying and possibly reading undesirable or painful works!

A specious reason, however, is advanced for exempting Literature from the Censorship accorded to Plays. He—it is said—who attends the performance of a play, attends it in public, where his feelings may be harrowed, and his taste offended, cheek by jowl with boys, or women of all ages ; it may even chance that he has taken to this entertainment his wife, or the young persons of his household. He—on the other hand—who reads a book, reads it in privacy. This is true ; yet, little reflection shows that the wielder of this argument has clasped his fingers round a two-edged blade. The very fact that the book has no mixed audience removes from Literature an element which is ever the greatest check on licentiousness in Drama. No manager of a theatre—a man of the world engaged in the acquisition of his livelihood—dare risk the presentment before a mixed audience of that which might cause an *émeute* among his clientry. It has, indeed, always been observed that the theatrical manager, almost without exception, thoughtfully recoils from the responsibility that would be thrust on him by the abolition of the Censorship. The fear of the mixed audience is ever suspended above his head ; but no such fear threatens the publisher who displays his wares

to one man at a time. And for this very reason of the mixed audience, perpetually and perversely cited to the contrary by such as have no firm grasp of this matter—there is an even greater necessity for a Censorship on Literature than for one on Plays.

Those, in fact, who rely on pedantic doctrines of a civic freedom subject only to Common Law, and espouse the cause of a free Literature, are championing a system which is essentially undemocratic, essentially inimical to the will of the majority, since a free literature protects advancing thought and speculation. Such pedants actually hold the faith *that the People, as a whole, unprotected by the arbitrary judgments of single persons, have enough strength and wisdom to know what is, and what is not, harmful to themselves. They even put their trust in a Public Press and a Common Law, which, deriving from the conscience of the Country, is openly administered and within the reach of all.* And with what lamentable issue ! Instead of numerous prosecutions in the interests of public decency, the years pass, witnessing a book called-in by the Police here and there, and but an occasional indictment. If this endure, how shall we maintain the ethics of a Literature, admittedly more decent than that of other countries, in its high purity ? How protect the great mass of persons who desire no spiritual disturbance ? There are even now

signs of grave public dissatisfaction with certain literary wares that have of late been offered to the commonalty. Had there been a Censorship of Literature we assert that—*even if these books had received their licences*—no spirit would have been troubled, no voice raised, no conscience stirred. For, that the perfect rest of the public conscience is the first result of Censorship, is proved to certainty by the protected Drama, where many dubious matters are yearly put before the play-going Public without tending in any way to disturb a complacency engendered by the security from harm guaranteed by this beneficent, if despotic, Institution. Pundits who, to the discomfort of the populace, foster this exemption of Literature from needed discipline, cling to the old-fashioned and disagreeable notion that ulcers should be encouraged to discharge themselves upon the surface, instead of being driven in and permitted quietly to absorb into the system. Little, we fear, can be done with persons of this kidney, save to disregard them.

The remaining plea for exempting Literature from Censorship, put forward by unreflecting persons, namely: That it would require too many Censors, besides being unworthy, is, on the face of it, erroneous. Special tests have never been thought necessary in appointing Examiners of Plays. They would, indeed, not only be unneces-

sary, but positively dangerous, seeing that the essential function of Censorship is protection of the ordinary prejudices and forms of thought. There would, then, be no difficulty in securing to-morrow as many Censors of Literature as might be necessary (say twenty or thirty); since all that would be required of each one of them would be that he should secretly exercise, in his uncontrolled discretion, his individual taste.

We have seen that certain short-sighted advocates of drawing invidious distinction between Literature and Plays have endeavoured to use the self-destructive argument of the mixed audience. No such two-edged weapon lies to the hands of those who endeavour to dissociate the case of Art. Every picture hung in a gallery, every statue placed on a pedestal, is exposed to the public stare of a mixed company. Why, then, have we no Censorship to protect us from the possibility of encountering works that bring blushes to the cheek of the young person? The reason cannot be that the proprietors of Galleries are more worthy of trust than the managers of Theatres; this would be to make an odious and totally untenable distinction. It is true that Societies of artists, and the proprietors of Galleries, are subject to the prose-

cution of the Law if they offend against the ordinary standards of public decency ; but this is no real protection—for precisely the same liability attaches to theatrical managers and proprietors of Theatres, in whose case it has been found necessary and beneficial to add the Censorship. And in this connection we would note how much more simply the ordinary standards of public decency can be assessed by a single person responsible to no one, than by the clumsy (if more open) process of public protest.

What, then, in the light of the proved justice and efficiency of the Censorship of Drama, is the reason for the absence of a Censorship of Art ? The more closely we regard this matter, the more plainly we discern that *there is none!* At any moment we may have to look upon some painting, or contemplate some statue, as tragic, heart-rending, and dubiously delicate in theme, as the “*Œdipus Tyrannus*” or “*The Cenci*” ; as dangerous to prejudice, and suggestive of new thought as “*Maternité*,” “*Ghosts*,” or “*Mrs. Warren’s Profession*.” We protest against this peril suspended above our heads, we demand the immediate institution of an office consisting of a single person not selected for any pretentiously artistic feelings, with summary powers of prohibiting the exhibition in public

galleries or places, of such works as he shall deem, in his uncontrolled discretion, unsuited to average intelligence or sensibility. We demand it in the interest, not only of the young person, but of those whole sections of the community which cannot be expected to take an interest in Art, and to whom the purpose, speculations, and achievements of great artists, working not only for to-day but for to-morrow, must naturally be dark riddles. We consider that he should further be empowered to order the destruction of the works which he has deemed unsuited to average intelligence and sensibility, lest their creators should, by private sale, make a profit out of them, such as, in the nature of the case, Dramatic Authors are debarred from making out of plays, which, having been censured, cannot be played for money. We ask this with some confidence. It is not compatible with common justice that there should be any favouring of Painter over Playwright. They are both artists—let them both be measured by the same last!

It will not, indeed cannot, be contended that the investigations of scientific men, whether committed to writing or to speech, are always suited to the capacities of our general public. There was, for example, the well-known doctrine of Evolution,

the teachings of Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, who gathered up certain facts, hitherto but vaguely known, into presentments, irreverent and startling, which, at the time, profoundly disturbed every normal mind. Not only did religion, as then accepted, suffer in this cataclysm, but our taste and feeling were inexpressibly shocked by the discovery, emphasised by Thomas Henry Huxley, of Man's descent from Apes. It was felt, and is felt by many to this day, that the advancement of that theory grossly and dangerously violated every canon of decency. What pain, then, might have been averted, what far-reaching consequences and incalculable subversion of primitive faiths checked, if some judicious Censor of scientific thought had existed in those days to demand, in accordance with his private estimate of the will and temper of the majority, the suppression of these daring spirits' iconoclastic works!

Innumerable investigations of scientists on subjects such as the date of the world's creation, have from time to time been summarised and inconsiderately sprung on a Public shocked and startled by the revelation that dates which they were accustomed to revere were conspicuously at fault. So, too, in the range of medicine, it would

be difficult to cite any radical discovery whose unchecked publication has not violated the prejudices and disturbed the immediate comfort of the common mind. Had these discoveries been judiciously suppressed, or pared away to suit what a Censorship conceived to be the popular palate of the time, all this disturbance and discomfort might well have been avoided.

It will doubtless be contended (for there are no such violent opponents of Censorship as those who are threatened with the same) that to compare such a momentous disclosure, as, for example, the doctrine of Evolution, to a mere drama, were unprofitable. The answer to this ungenerous contention is fortunately plain. Had a judicious Censorship existed over our scientific matters, such as for the last two hundred years has existed over Drama, scientific works *would have been no more disturbing and momentous than those which we are accustomed to see produced by our nicely pruned and tutored stage*. For not only would the more dangerous and penetrating scientific truths have been carefully destroyed at birth, but scientists, aware that the results of investigations offensive to accepted notions would be suppressed, would long have ceased to waste their time in search of a knowledge repugnant to

average intelligence, and have occupied themselves with services more agreeable to the public taste, such as the re-discovery of truths already known and published.

Indissolubly connected with the desirability of a Censorship of Science, is the need for Religious Censorship. For in this, assuredly not the least important department of the nation's life, we are witnessing week by week and year by year what, in the light of the security guaranteed by the Censorship of Drama, we are justified in terming the alarming spectacle of thousands of men licensed to proclaim from their pulpits, Sunday after Sunday, their individual beliefs, regardless of the settled convictions of the masses of their congregations. It is very true, indeed, that the vast majority of sermons (like the vast majority of plays) are, and will always be, sufficiently harmonious with the feelings of the average citizen; for neither priest nor playwright have customarily any such outrageous gift of spiritual daring as might render them unsafe mentors of their fellows; and there is not wanting the deterrent of common sense to keep them in bounds. Yet it can hardly be denied that there spring up at times men—like John Wesley—of such incurable temperament as to be capable of abusing their freedom by the

promulgation of doctrine divergent from the then accepted traditions of religion. Nor must it be forgotten that sermons, like plays, are addressed to a mixed audience of families, and that the spiritual teachings of a lifetime may be destroyed by ten minutes of uncensored pronouncement from a pulpit, the while parents are sitting, not, as in a theatre, vested with the right of protest, but dumb and excoriated to the soul, watching their children, perhaps of tender age, eagerly drinking in a doctrine at variance with that which they themselves have been at such pains to instil.

If a set of Censors—for it would, as in the case of Literature, indubitably require more than one*—endowed with the swift powers conferred by freedom from the dull tedium of responsibility, and not remarkable for religious temperament, were appointed, to whom all sermons and public addresses on religious subjects must be submitted before delivery, and whose duty, after perusal, should be to excise all portions not conformable to their private ideas of what was at the moment suitable to the Public's ears, we should be far on the road towards that proper preservation of the "status quo" so desirable if the faiths and ethical

* We estimate the number at 180, but, for reasons already given, there should be no great difficulty in procuring them.

standards of the less exuberantly spiritual masses are to be maintained in their authority. As things now stand, the nation has nothing to safeguard it against religious extravagance of all sorts save that dim spirit of proportion, that general good sense, which some, still, in spite of all demonstration to the contrary, *actually maintain to be fostered by free institutions, and to be conspicuously present in this country!*

We have demanded, with some confidence, introduction of the principle of Censorship into the four departments of Literature, Art, Science, and Religion ; it is now our duty to call attention to the crowning need—the want of a Censorship in Politics.

If Censorship be based on justice, if it be proved to serve the Public, and to be successful in its lonely vigil over Drama ; if it should, *and must be*, extended to all parallel cases—it cannot, it dare not, stop short at Politics. For it is precisely in this supreme branch of the public life that we are most menaced by the rule and licence of the leading spirit. To appreciate this fact, we need only examine the Constitution of the House of Commons.* Six hundred and seventy persons chosen from a population numbering four and forty millions, must needs be, whatever

* The House of Lords, by virtue of heredity, is inevitably unrepresentative of the needs and aspirations of the multitude.

their individual defects, citizens of *more than average* enterprise, resource, and resolution. They are elected for a period that may last seven years, during which they cannot be unseated. Many of them are ambitious ; some uncompromising ; not a few enthusiastic, eager to do something for their country ; filled with designs and aspirations for national or social betterment, with which the masses, sunk in the immediate pursuits of life, can in the nature of things have little sympathy. And yet we find these men licensed to pour forth at pleasure, before mixed audiences, *checked only by Common Law and Common Sense*, political utterances which may have the gravest, the most terrific consequences ; utterances which may at any moment let loose revolution, or plunge the country into war ; which often, as a fact, excite an utter detestation, terror, and mistrust ; or shock the most sacred domestic and proprietary convictions in the breasts of vast majorities of their fellow countrymen ! And we incur this appalling risk for the want of a single, or at the most, a handful of Censors, invested with a *simple but limitless discretion to excise or to suppress entirely such political utterances as may seem to their private judgments calculated to cause pain or moral disturbance in the average man*. The masses, it is true, have their indifferent protection and remedy against in-

judicious or inflammatory politicians, in the Law and the so-called democratic process of election ; but it will hardly have escaped public cognisance that, for that matter, theatre audiences have also the protection of the Law, and the remedy of boycott. In their case, as we have seen, this protection and this remedy are not enough. What, then, shall we say of the case of Politics, where the dangers attending inflammatory or subversive utterance are greater a million fold, and the remedy a thousand times less expeditious ?

It is, then, for the general good that we call on the representatives of the nation not only to establish forthwith Censorships of Literature, Art, Science, and Religion, but to place themselves beneath the regimen by which, with such beneficial results, they have fettered Dramatic Authors. We cannot think that they will deem it becoming to their sense of justice or to their honour to recoil from a restriction which, in a parallel case, for the good of the majority, they have imposed on others. It is an old and homely saying that good officers never place their men in positions they would not themselves be willing to fill. And we are not minded to believe that our Legislators, having set Dramatic Authors where they have been set, will—now that their duty has been made plain to them—for a moment hesitate to step down and stand alongside.

We call on them to do this, and with confidence await the event.

But if by any chance they should recoil, and thus make answer: "We are ready at all times to submit to the Law and the People's will, and to bow to their demands; *but we cannot and must not be asked to place our calling, our duty, and our honour, beneath the irresponsible rule of an arbitrary autocrat, however sympathetic with the generalty he may chance to be!*" then, but only then, we are compelled, in so grave a matter, to remind them of that great saying: "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you!" For it is but fair presumption that Dramatic Authors, whom for the public good our Legislators have placed in bondage to a despot, are, no less than those Legislators, proud of their calling, conscious of their duty, or jealous of their honour.

Let it no longer go forth to the world that our Legislators renounce for themselves that Censorship which they have laid down as the basic principle of justice governing the civic rights of other men! Let this Country no longer be Ridden and destroyed by those free institutions that yet survive!

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